

Rooted in Dust: Surviving Drought and Depression in Southwestern Kansas

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in the health care professions as elsewhere, are, for the most part, matters of state and local politics, arenas in which public sentiment often outweighs the supposed mandates of reason and science and even the power of organized interest groups. Matched against chiropractic in a prolonged grassroots contest for the hearts and minds of health care consumers, organized medicine clearly was not the juggernaut medical historians have long supposed.

Rooted in Dust: Surviving Drought and Depression in Southwestern Kansas, by Pamela Riney-Kehrberg. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994. xiv, 249 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$25.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL SCHUYLER, UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT KEARNEY

The Great Depression, New Deal farm policies, and especially the "Dust Bowl" experience of farmers stricken by the depression, have been the subject of numerous scholarly studies by historians such as R. Douglas Hurt, Donald Worster, Walter J. Stein, and Paul Bonnifield. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg's book covers a lot of familiar territory, but focuses on the people in sixteen Dust Bowl counties in southwestern Kansas who, in spite of drought, blowing dust, and the collapse of the farm economy, managed to stay in the region. Agriculture receives the most attention, but the author also discusses the largest Kansas communities located in the Dust Bowl—Liberal, Garden City, and Dodge City.

Southwestern Kansas experienced rapid growth and general prosperity from the turn of the twentieth century until the collapse of farm prices in 1931. Unfortunately for residents of the region, the beginning of the economic depression in agriculture coincided with the onset of a drought cycle that would afflict the Dust Bowl counties for the next eight years. As the depression deepened, many farmers and town dwellers in southwestern Kansas began to leave to search for a better life. By 1940 the Dust Bowl counties had lost from one-third to half of their populations. Riney-Kehrberg concludes, unlike many other historians who have studied Great Plains agriculture in the 1930s, that hard times, and not the rapid mechanization of agriculture, was the major reason people left the region.

The most important question the author examines is why people *stayed* in the Dust Bowl region. She concludes that no single factor can explain why some residents persisted while others failed to meet the challenge of drought and depression. She reasons, however, that large landholdings, close family ties, diversified farming practices, previous

levels of prosperity, ingenuity, and government aid were important factors in surviving the Dust Bowl experience.

Assessing the lasting impact of the depression, Riney-Kehrberg points out that the area became prosperous again with the return of rain and the beginning of World War II. Determined not to repeat the past, farmers in southwestern Kansas increasingly relied on irrigation and tried to attract more manufacturing to diversify the economy of the area. Many of the counties she studied, however, never regained the populations they had prior to the depression decade. She concludes that the area will always be threatened by drought, that the environment is fragile, and that dust storms will periodically return to the region. At the same time, however, she argues that the area continues to have a viable economic future, particularly by raising cattle.

This is a first-rate work of scholarship. The book is well written, and the author's conclusions are carefully reasoned and well documented. The use of a questionnaire, in addition to standard manuscript and archival collections, makes the research both comprehensive and creative. The focus on the experiences of people in southwestern Kansas who persisted in the region adds to our understanding of the Dust Bowl during the 1930s. The book will be of general interest to students of the Great Plains.

Henry Wallace: His Search for a New World Order, by Graham White and John Maze. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995. xv, 347 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$34.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY MARK L. KLEINMAN, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-OSHKOSH

Historian Graham White and psychologist John Maze have written the first biography of Henry A. Wallace that fully addresses the most difficult and awkward questions about Iowa's most misunderstood favorite son. Their account of Wallace's life and career is framed by an understanding of the sources, nature, and extent of his much-rumored but little-examined spiritualism. Drawing predominantly on Wallace's reminiscences contained in his 1952 interview in the Columbia University Oral History Collection, as well as on the political diary he kept during his years in government (1933-1946), White and Maze examine Wallace's involvement with the spiritual amalgam of Theosophy and attempt to show how it and other of Wallace's "eclectic" spiritual beliefs informed his social and political philosophy and so "made an impact on his public career" (xiii).

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